

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Rep. Mike Honda (D – CA) addressed the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment in support of H. Res. 121, a bipartisan resolution he introduced on January 31, 2007, calling on the government of Japan to formally acknowledge and apologize for the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces' World War II-era coercion of some 200,000 young women -- known as 'comfort women' -- into sexual slavery. The video and transcript of Rep. Honda's statement follows:

Thank you, Chairman Faleomavaega, for holding this historic hearing. And thank you for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on the comfort women tragedy, which my good friend and our former colleague, Lane Evans long advocated to be addressed by the U.S. Congress.

As the members of the Subcommittee know, I recently introduced H.Res.121, a resolution calling on the Government of Japan to formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Force's coercion of young women and girls into sexual slavery starting in the 1930s during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands. Euphemistically known as "Comfort Women," these violated women have too long been denied their dignity and honor.

My interest in seeking justice for the Comfort Women began during my career as a schoolteacher in San Jose. A couple decades ago, I learned that Japan's Ministry of Education sought to omit or downplay the comfort women tragedy in its approved textbooks. As a teacher interested in historical reconciliation, I knew the importance of teaching and talking about tragedy and injustice without flinching from the details. Without honesty and candor, there is no foundation for reconciliation.

My subsequent research on Japan's long unresolved history issues with its former adversaries led me to pursue efforts toward reconciliation in the California State Assembly. In 1999, I authored Assembly Joint Resolution 27 (AJR27), which called on Congress to urge the Japanese government to issue an apology for the victims of the Rape of Nanking, Comfort Women, and POWs who were used as slave laborers. The resolution was ultimately passed.

Now, nearly nine years after the passage of AJR27, I stand united with several of my colleagues in the House, from both parties, in support of H.Res.121 and the surviving Comfort Women who are here with us today. The urgency is upon this Committee and the Congress to take quick action on this resolution. These women are aging and their numbers dwindling with each passing day. If we do not act now, we will lose a historic opportunity to encourage the Government of Japan to properly acknowledge responsibility for the plight of the Comfort Women.

Elected officials of Japan have taken steps to address this issue, and for that they are to be commended. In 1993, Japan's then Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono issued an encouraging statement regarding Comfort Women, which expressed the Government's sincere apologies and remorse for their ordeal. Additionally, Japan attempted to provide monetary compensation to surviving comfort women through the Asia Women's Fund, a government initiated and largely

government-funded private foundation whose purpose was the carrying out of programs and projects with the aim of atonement for the Comfort Women. The Asia Women's Fund is to be disbanded on March 31, 2007.

Recent attempts, however, by some senior members of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party to review and even possibly retract Secretary Kono's statement are disheartening and mark Japan's equivocation on this issue. Additionally, while I appreciate Japan's creation of the Asia Women's Fund and the past prime minister's apologies to some comfort women, which accompanied this Fund's disbursement of monetary compensation from this fund, the reality is that without a sincere and unequivocal apology from the government of Japan, the majority of surviving Comfort Women refused to accept these funds. In fact, as you will hear today, many Comfort Women returned the Prime Minister's letter of apology accompanying the monetary compensation saying they felt the apology was artificial and disingenuous.

Mr. Chairman, let me make my intentions abundantly clear: this resolution provides for historical reconciliation and then moving forward. It is not in any way meant to and should not damage our strong relationship with Japan. I understand that many feel strongly that this resolution is unnecessary, that it focuses too much on the past, and fear it will negatively affect regional stability along with our alliance with Japan.

These worries are unfounded. I feel strongly that accepting responsibility for the Comfort Women tragedy is worthy of a nation as great as Japan is to do. I also feel strongly that reconciliation on this issue will have a positive effect upon relationships in the region as historical anxieties are put to rest.

I ask that Members of Congress understand that apologies on matters of historical significance are important and that they are the first, necessary steps in any attempt to reconcile differences or atone for past actions. Our government has made its own mistakes. But in its wisdom, it has made the difficult choice to admit wrongdoing.

For example, in 1988, Congress passed, and President Ronald Reagan signed into law, H.R. 442, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which was a formal apology to U.S. citizens of Japanese ancestry who were unjustly put into internment camps during World War II. As someone who was put into an internment camp as an infant, I know firsthand that we must not be ignorant of the past, and that reconciliation through government actions to admit error are the only ones likely to be long lasting.

For many Japanese Americans whose civil and constitutional rights were violated by internment, that dark chapter of history was closed by the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, which emerged over 40 years after internment. Seeking reparations was a long and arduous journey, but the apology, once it came, was clear and unequivocal. Reconciliation is something our generation should rightfully be calling for in order to promote the growth of a peaceful global society, and to address issues of the past so we can finally put them to rest.

Americans have high expectations of close allies such as Japan, which shares so many of our values and ideals. Japan's current approach of denial to the Comfort Woman tragedy -- some

call it a historic fabrication -- detracts from the relationship and questions the overall alliance in the eyes of Japan's neighbors. It compels one also to question Japan's appreciation of the Dutch, British, and Australian soldiers who recently guarded Japan's Self Defense Forces in Iraq, whose country's nationals are said to have been included in the Comfort Women system. Most important, the failure of Japan to successfully resolve their culpability and responsibility toward the Comfort Women casts doubt upon Japan's commitment to human rights, violence against women in war and UN leadership.

Mr. Chairman, for reconciliation and justice for these women, I have worked very hard to bring these three survivors, Ms. Lee Yong Soo, Ms. Kim Koon-Ja, and Ms. Jan Ruff O'Herne, to Washington. They are the human face of the wartime violence against women. Their words reflect not just history but the continued pattern of organized abuse of women in conflict. Members of Congress who feel that this resolution is unnecessary need to look no further than these three women who know that they speak not just for themselves but also for the young women in Burma, Bosnia, and Darfur.

I commend groups such as the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women, Amnesty International, V-Day, the Korean American Voter's Council, the National Korean American Service and Education Consortium the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, Justice for Comfort Women, the Global Alliance for Preserving History of World War II in Asia, and the Center for Women Policy Studies for their continued and tireless work on behalf of these women -- without which much of the efforts to keep this issue alive would have failed long ago.

I urge the Committee to act swiftly on H.Res.121 so that it soon may come to the floor for a vote. The strength and humanity of these women and the truths to which they testify today must supersede any political pressures to stop this resolution.

Thank you.